For Immediate Release:
June 25, 2004

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Virginia State Fire Marshal Promotes Safety for July 4 Holiday

RICHMOND – The Virginia State Fire Marshal's Office reminds citizens that the best way to celebrate the Fourth of July is to spend the holiday with family and friends and enjoy a professional fireworks show. Doing so will add excitement to the holiday and help prevent injuries, deaths, and property damage caused by illegal fireworks and legal consumer fireworks.

"The Fourth of July is an excellent time for Virginians to show their patriotism," said Charles E. Altizer, Virginia State Fire Marshal. "One of the safest and most entertaining ways to do that is to attend a professional fireworks display," said Altizer. "Leave the fireworks to the professionals to ensure a safe and patriotic holiday for yourself and your family."

Virginia's laws prohibit the use of consumer fireworks for private use with the following exceptions: sparklers, fountains, pharaohs, serpents, and caps. It is important to note that consumer fireworks can also be dangerous, not only to the user but to surrounding property and bystanders, especially children. Additionally, localities have the right to totally prohibit the use of these products in their areas.

According to statistics from the National Fire Prevention Association, there were an estimated 8,800 fireworks-related injuries reported to emergency rooms in 2002 throughout the country. **From 1995 to 1999, on annual average, nine people were killed by fires started by fireworks and seven were killed directly by fireworks. In 1999, fires started by fireworks caused $17.2 million in direct property damage.**

"These statistics prove the point that fireworks, regardless if they are illegal or those that are legally available for purchase by consumers, are dangerous," said Altizer. "Even sparklers, which most people consider safe, can be dangerous. They reach temperatures above 1000 degrees Fahrenheit and can seriously burn people or cause a fire," explained Altizer. "Again, we strongly encourage citizens to attend professional, public fireworks displays in their area and avoid using fireworks themselves over the July 4th weekend."

The Fourth of July is a wonderful day to express pride in our country and celebrate our nation's independence. Please follow the advice of the Virginia State Fire Marshal's Office to make your holiday safe and enjoyable. For more information or questions regarding fireworks safety, call (804) 371-7170 or contact your local fire marshal.

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